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Race, Caste and Tribe in Central India: The Early Origins of Indian Anthropometry

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Nineteen eighty nine was the 100th anniversary of the commencement of the very first ethnographic survey of India and to celebrate this the government commissioned a new multi-volume survey of all of India's so-called tribes and castes. Despite a renewed emphasis on social and cultural indicators, often absent from the very first surveys, the work of physical anthropologists and the techniques of 'anthropometry', which indeed formed their basis, would not, it was said, necessarily be ignored. The only difference in methodology between the two surveys was to be that where the British drew a line and refused to include communities of less than 2,000 in number, the new survey would go down to the last 200; and where cranial measurements were once the key indicator of differing racial type, this time it was blood groups that more often were to be preferred as the crucial indicator of physical difference.[1] Such contemporary concerns show that the concept of race has had a powerful effect on Indian scholars and academics. But that is not to say that the idea of race is unique to contemporary India. Indeed, there are ideas of difference, generalised to describe whole communities, that are to be found in a variety of ancient Indian texts. Moreover, in India today, amongst academics outside of the government-run anthropological survey of India, there may be found a great variety of ways of thinking about cultural, social and political differences amongst Indian communities in the recent as well as in the distant past. At one level, the differing abstract ideas of intellectuals on the issue of race cannot be said to form a coherent unity, however a unity of thinking on this issue to be found in certain organs of the administration as well as amongst the wider population. This mode of thinking, or 'discourse', has been described as a 'colonial discourse'. This discourse of race, arising from the period of European

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The records of the Government of the Central Provinces of India referred to were consulted in the Madhya Pradesh Central Record Office in Nagpur and in the Central Secretariat in Bhopal, India. These archives are referred to as MPCRO and BP respectively. Use was also made of the British Museum Library in London, the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, the Cambridge University Library and the Scottish National Library in Edinburgh. IOR refers to the India Office Records in London; NAI refers to the National Archives of India in New Delhi.

[1] Personal interview with A.K. Danda, Deputy Director of the Anthropological Survey of India, Calcutta, February 1989.

colonialism, has been described as 'hegemonic', since despite the great variety of views amongst its practitioners, and the existence of many contemporary critics of nineteenth century theories of race, it nonetheless embodied a unity of form and substance: even those who disagreed with it were forced to accept its basic terms of reference. The discourse of race was also hegemonic in that it was universal in its application: colonisers as well as the colonised were classified in the nineteenth century taxonomies of race, and even those unflatteringly described in such taxonomies were widely convinced of their validity and relevance. Not surprisingly Indian elites were seen to share features in common with their European masters: assets that could doubtlessly be enhanced with the aid of western education and under the beneficence of British rule. Despite this, it was at the same time undoubtedly an 'orientalist' discourse in that however universally the 'scientific' theories of race were applied, and no matter how much subtlety or variety might be described amongst the different species to be 'mapped' (or pinned, like butterflies) within the Indian subcontinent, there was always one ineluctable conclusion to be drawn: that the modern European (particularly the Briton) was superior to any other race, and that the degree of difference between the European and other races was simultaneously a measure of the backwardness of the 'subject' (or objectified) population. There was no vast conspiracy, no single conception of the relationship between race and caste, and much disinterested speculation amongst nineteenth century scholars only indirectly related to the complex business of managing the British empire. Nevertheless, the nineteenth century conception of 'race' has outlived its critics, and to this day remains fundamental to popular and even some academic conceptions of political, social and cultural difference, both in Britain and India. In this, like the 'science' of anthropology and so many other of the social sciences, it betrays its practical relevance to the political, if not technical, management of modern industrial society.

That the idea of race should be useful, however, does not also make it 'true', and we may in the present, be moving towards a time in which the utility and relevance of nineteenth and early twentieth century conceptions of race and caste may be on the wane. Controversy in this regard has focussed on the issues of positive discrimination and of 'reservation' both in India and in the United States. Amongst historians there has been a shift towards the study of polities and cultures and away from the study of caste and class - with as yet indeterminate effects. The concept of race, however, undoubtedly captured a moment in the history of western thought, and its influence cannot be overestimated. Nonetheless the importance of racial theory in the social history of the past two centuries, and in particular in the history of European colonialism, is still underestimated, and India is still often seen to be immune to many of the prejudices and fashions that held sway in other colonial territories in the same period. In this sense, however, India is not unique,

and the conceptions of race, caste and tribe in south Asia have numerous analogues elsewhere in the colonial empires of the nineteenth century. At the same time I would argue, perhaps more controversially, that there was nothing inevitable about the rise or hegemony of the conception of race with which we are all so familiar: intellectual fashions might at any time have taken a very different course, and it is in the unique relationships and in the transmission of ideas between a relatively small intellectual elite in America and Europe, and in the colonial administrations of Africa, the Middle East and Asia at this time, that we may find the origins of the modern conception of race. In this enterprise the 'laboratory' was not simply India, but the whole of humankind, and although the paradigm of the new science was elitist, both in India and the west, its epistemology had much in common with the 'sciences' in general, whilst its applications were not uniquely imperial but characteristic, much more generally, of the *modus operandi* of the modern, centralised, bureaucratic State.

THE GENESIS OF ANTHROPOMETRY

Xenophobia, or the fear of strangers and of the unknown, is a common feature in human society. When strangers are associated together as a group it is also perhaps natural to assume that any individual will have all the characteristics imputed to that group. People often associate themselves together for reasons of culture, appearance, religion or belief. Some may believe that they are a 'chosen people' and superior to other groups of people. These views are all 'racism' of a sort and are to be found in places at all times in history. Such ideas however must be clearly distinguished from what Philip Curtin has described as 'the full-blown pseudo-scientific racism' which dominated European thought from the 1840's until the middle of this century. The difference lay, as Curtin describes it, in that ' "science", the body of knowledge rationally derived from empirical observation, then supported the proposition that race was one of the principal determinants of attitudes, endowments, capabilites and inherent tendencies among human beings. Race thus seemed to determine the course of human history.'[2]

Whilst the Spanish and Portugese had to form a view of the status of the New World populations very early on as a result of their experience of direct territorial control (the conclusion of the Catholic church being that they did indeed have souls and were therefore worth at least the effort of conversion), for the British no systematic approach to the question was necessary until the nineteenth century. As a result, much of the early work on racial classification was undertaken by biologists beginning, most importantly, with the

[2] Philip D. Curtin, *The Image of Africa: British Ideas and action,1780-1850*, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1964), p. 29.

work of a Swede, Carolus Linnaeus. Linnaeus' *Systema Naturae*, published in 1735, elaborated the classical idea of a 'Great Chain of Being', according to which God (or Nature) had organised the world so that all living things could be classified and fitted into a hierarchy extending from man down to smallest insect. A common Biblical classification of the time was to describe the races of man as descendants of Ham, Shem and Japhet. Linnaeus broke from this by distinguishing four races deduced from growing European knowledge of the extra-European world. These were the Homo Americanus (described as obstinate, contented and free), Homo Europaeus (fickle, keen, inventive), Homo Asiaticus (grave, dignified, avaricious), and Homo Afer (cunning, lazy and careless). Others followed, with more varied distinctions, but probably the first to postulate measurable (and therefore verifiable) differences was the Dutchman, Pieter Camper (1722-1789). 'Camper's facial Angle', as it became known, was essentially a measure of prognathism, deduced from observation of the human head in profile, and measured by drawing a line from the meeting of the lips to the middle of the forehead and another from the opening of the ear to the base. The angle between these two lines was then supposedly useful as a means of distinguishing and ranking the races of man, a bigger angle indicating a greater skull capacity and a greater intelligence, assumed to be normal among Europeans.[3]

Although Camper soon fell out of favour, largely because of the difficulty in taking such measurements, new measurements and assessments of racial difference were constantly sought, if only in an effort to make sense of the alarming differences in the habit and lifestyle of populations increasingly being encountered by Europeans in different parts of the world. Such differences were particularly important to adherents of 'polygenesis', a minority position at the time, which contradicted the conventional Biblical view of 'monogenesis', that there was a single creation of the human species and that subsequent variation was largely a product of culture and environment. A significant contribution to this debate in Britain in the late eighteenth century was Edward Long's *History of Jamaica*, published in 1774, an attempt to back up the polygenist perspective using technical (although wholly spurious) biological arguments. Long concluded that there were basically three races: Europeans (and others like them), Negroes and orang-outangs, a view that was quickly harnessed in support of slavery, particularly in the United States. Charles White, an anti-slavery campaigner, disputed Long's views after examining various animal and human skulls and pointing out inconsistencies in his evidence. It was the German S.T. von Soemmering however who first published comparative measurements of Africans and European anatomies in 1785. Although von Soemmering pointed to numerous similarities, his work suggested the possibility of differences between the

[3] Curtin, *The Image of Africa*, p. 39.

intelligence of the two races, which instantly confirmed the prejudices of polygenist theorists.[4]

Baron Cuvier (1769-1832) in Switzerland began to lay the foundations of the modern sciences of comparative anatomy and paleontology, but the evidence available to Cuvier on anatomical variations within the human species was still extremely limited, and his conclusions concerning cranial capacities, based on Soemmering, merely confirmed earlier racial chauvinisms. Others, such as the English physical anthropologist James Cowles Prichard, with neither the tools nor data to work on, fell back on unmeasurable, aesthetic criterian to construct their theories. It was the science of Phrenology however which first attempted to link together culture and physical features, the science being pioneered by the Viennese Franz Joseph Gall (1757-1828), who later moved to Paris, and Gaspar Spunzheim (1774-1832) in Trier in Germany. Gall's six volume study *Sur l'origine des qualités modes et des facultées de l'homme et sur les conditions de leur manifestation*, (Paris, 1822) was for many years a standard reference work, and there were soon several British practitioners, one of the earliest being George Combe, who was personally converted to the new science by Spunzheim, and whose *Essays on Phrenology*, the first of many editions, was published in 1819.[5]

In Britain, the work of Cuvier helped to undermine polygenesis and was therefore of some assistance in the campaign against slavery. The campaign itself however never went so far as to suggest the equality of the races of man, and although in defence of slavery the pro-lobby used crude xenophobia and dwelt on the political and economic expediency of continuing the slave trade, it avoided as far as possible making use of the pseudo-science of racial theory. When the slave trade was finally abolished in 1807, of course, slavery was not, and there was nothing then to prevent the development of this field: no sympathetic lobby to dissuade biologists and physical anthropologists from using pseudo-scientific theory to argue the case for maintaining the subordination of already enslaved peoples in America, or elsewhere.

The so-called 'science' of anthropometry, as it became understood, was first devised by American polygenist anthropologists in the 1830s, possibly as part of a more general reaction against political developments across the Atlantic. Foremost amongst them was the Philadelphia physician Samuel George Morton, who was influenced by Combe and probably enjoyed a higher reputation than any other American scientist of his time.

[4] Curtin, *The Image of Africa*, pp. 45-48.

[5] G. Combe, *Essays on Phrenology*, (Edinburgh, 1819). The enlarged, American edition of this book appeared under the title *A System of Phrenology* in 1845.

Together with the theoretician Louis Agassiz, Morton provided a systematic justification for American slavery by arguing in a series of articles that the human races were entirely separate, created species. This endeavour was gratefully acknowledged at Morton's death in 1851 by the Charleston Medical Journal which wrote: 'We of the South should consider him as our benefactor for aiding most materially in giving to the negro his true position as an inferior race' [6]

The evidential basis for Morton's arguments was his collection of skulls, reputed to be the largest in the world. These skulls he measured and assessed in order to arrive at a systematic ranking of human races according to mental capacity. Needless to say, the results of Morton's work, published in three massive volumes between 1839 and 1849 confirmed the whites as the most intelligent race, the American Indian to be less intelligent, the Hindus to be more inferior still, and the negro to be the stupidest of the lot.

Apart from the incorrect association of bodily stature, cranial cavity and intelligence, implicit in this work, subsequent re-assessment has shown that Morton consistently (though probably unintentionally), falsified his results. At the time, however, Morton was highly regarded, his only opponents being the biblically motivated monogenists, who believed all races to be descended from Adam. Even the monogenists, however, were forced to agree that even if of the same species, the African was an inferior variety - its degradation being a consequence of the tropical environment.

The publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species* in 1859, undermined the position of both monogenists and polygenists, but at the same time as affirming the essential unity of the human species, evolutionism, by establishing extraordinarily long time scales as the basis for human development, allowed for the conception of far greater variety than had previously been thought. No longer was it thought that the Negro's hair might straighten and his skin turn white after prolonged exposure to the more equable climate of the U.S.A.[7] The new orthodoxy established the negro as a related, but previous and probably inferior form of *homo sapiens,* placed halfway between the caucasian and the ape.

In support of this theory the developing science of anthropometry seemed to offer novel and certain proof. A pioneer of this technique was Paul Broca, a Professor of clinical surgery, who founded the Anthropological Society of Paris in 1859. It was Broca's conviction that human races could be ranked on a linear scale of mental worth: 'it did not

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6 Stephen Jay Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 1981), p. 69. A detailed biography of Morton by Marc Swetlitz is also to be found in G. W. Stocking (ed.), *Bones, Bodies, Behaviour: essays on biological anthropology*, (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988).

7 Gould, *op. cit.* p.39

occur to him that human variation might be ramified and random rather than linear and hierarchical' (Gould). And since he knew the order already, anthropometry in his hand became a search for characters that would display the correct ranking, rather than an exercise in raw empiricism.[8]

Much of Broca's work was carried out using patients in Parisian hospitals as his subject and his conclusions, unsurprisingly, were deeply misogynist, as well as racist. One of his erstwhile students wrote: 'in the most intelligent races, as among the Parisians, there are a large number of women, whose brains are closer in size to those of gorillas than to the most developed male brains. This inferiority is so obvious that no one can contest it for a moment; only its degree is worth discussion'.[9]

Professor Paul Topinard, Broca's chief disciple, explained this phenomenon as follows: 'the man who fights for two or more in the struggle for existence, who has all the responsibility and the cares of tomorrow, who is constantly active in combating the environment and human rivals, needs more brain than woman whom he must protect and nourish, than the sedentary woman, lacking any interior occupations, whose role is to raise children, love and be passive.' [10]

Topinard himself acquired a reputation as one of the leading anthropologists of the second half of the nineteenth century and it was naturally to his authority, and to his English contemporary Sir William Flower, the Hunterian Professor of Comparative Anatomy and President of the Anthropological Institute (1883-85), that Indian ethnographers deferred in their efforts to quantify and codify the castes and tribes of India.

COLONIAL ANTHROPOLOGY IN INDIA

The discourse surrounding the cognitive status of caste in India has a long history, and it has been touched upon in a recent article by Rashmi Pant, as well as in the critiques of orientalist Indology recently published by Bernard Cohn and Ron Inden.[11]

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8 See P. Broca, 'Sur le volume et la forme du cerveau suivant les individus et suivant les races', *Bulletin Société d'Anthropologie Paris*, vol. 2, (Paris, 1861).

9 LeBon, G., 1879. 'Rechèrches anatomiques et mathematiques sur les lois des variations du volume du cerveau et sur leurs relations avec l'intelligence', *Revue d'Anthropologie*, 2nd series, vol. 2, (Paris), pp. 60-62; cited in Gould, *op. cit.* p. 105.

10 P. Topinard. 'Les poids de l'encéphale d'apres les registres de Paul Broca', *Mémoires Société d'Anthropologie Paris*, 2nd series, vol. 3, pp. 1-41; cited in Gould, *op. cit.*, p. 104. See also P. Topinard, *Anthropology*, (London: Chapman & Hall, 1878).

11 B. Cohn, 'The command of language and the language of command', in R. Guha (ed.), *Subaltern Studies 4*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 276-329; R. Inden, *Imagining India*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990); R.Pant, 'The cognitive status of caste in colonial ethnography: a review of some literature on the

The earliest use of caste as a basis for interpreting social and demographic data arose from British officials' concern to stamp out female infanticide, which they believed to be customary in western and northern India in the mid nineteenth century.[12] Later on the use of caste at an all-India scale to categorize the population according to occupation and social structure formed a more sophisticated basis for British attempts at social engineering.

The criminalization of certain tribes, for example, provided a means of controlling turbulent populations in the more inaccessible or 'lawless' parts of the subcontinent. According to these laws (most infamously the Criminal Tribes Act of 1871) , tribes such as the Maghyar Doms in Bihar, the Kunjurs or Khangars in Bundelkund and the Ramosi, Mang, Kaikari or Bowrie tribes in the Narmada valley were described as habitually criminal, and adult male members of such groups forced to report weekly to the local police.[13] Other categories of caste such as moneylending, agricultural or 'martial' were used as a basis for legislation controlling land transfers, the grant of proprietary rights, and the regulation of rents, as well as a basis for distinguishing between the loyal and the disloyal, and for recruiting to the armed forces.

Overall, the purpose of this process of categorisation and research was summed up by Denzil Ibbetson as follows: 'Our ignorance of the customs and beliefs of the people among whom we dwell is surely in some respects a reproach to us; for not only does that ignorance deprive European science of material which it greatly needs, but it also involves a distinct loss of administrative power to ourselves'.[14]

As early as 1841 a new ethnological questionnaire produced by the British Association for the Advancement of Science, based on one published by the Société Ethnologique in

NorthWest Provinces and Oudh', *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 24, 2 (1987), 145-162. See also N.B. Dirks, 'The Invention of caste: civil society in colonial India', *Social Analysis*, 25 (1989).

[12] The Rajputs, the caste believed to be most commonly practising female infanticide, were also those thought to be responsible for the reported incidents of Sati (the self-immolation of Hindu widows). The nature of official enquiries into these two phenomena thus shared many features: see Lata Mani, 'Contentious traditions: the debate on Sati in colonial India', in Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid (es.), *Recasting Women: essays in colonial history*, (Delhi: Kali for Women, 1989). The campaign against infanticide is notable for marking the first introduction of birth-registration to the subcontinent.

[13] See E.J. Gunthorpe, *Notes on Criminal Tribes Residing in or Frequenting the Bombay Presidency, Berar and the Central Provinces*, (Bombay, 1882); also G.W. Gayer, C.P. Police, *Lectures on some criminal tribes*.(IOL: V/27/161/16); A.E.M. Le Marchand, *A guide to the Criminal Tribes of the Central Provinces* (IOL: V/27/161/15); and M. Kennedy, *The Criminal Classes in India* (Delhi, 1908), reprinted by Mittal, New Delhi, 1985. For a description of the notorious 1871 Criminal Tribes Act and it's effects see S. Nigam, 'Disciplining and policing the "criminals by birth", parts 1 & 2', *IESHR*, 27, 2 & 3: 131-165 & 257-288, (Delhi: Sage, 1990).

[14] Ibbetson, *loc. cit.*

Paris, requested detailed descriptions of individual and family life, including the life cycle, details of language and measurements of the head (the questionnaire being reprinted and enlarged in 1852). However such procedures, and particularly the measurement of heads, do not seem at first to have been widely used in India. The earliest forms of classification in the censuses of 1865, 1872 and 1881 were instead based on a Brahminic theory of caste classification, with the population being divided into Brahmans, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Sudras. However, although this categorisation met with the approval of Sanskrit scholars and others well versed in the Vedic myths, the simple four-fold varna categorization neither corresponded to the relationships that practically existed between the castes, and nor did it serve any particularly useful administrative purpose.

The 1891 census was therefore based instead primarily on occupational criteria: the materialist evolutionary basis for this classification having been first laid down by J.C. Nesfield in a study of the castes of north India, and by Denzil Ibbetson in his introduction to the 1881 census of the Punjab.[15]

Ibbetson summarised the popular and currently received theory of caste as follows:

(1) that caste is an institution of the Hindu religion, and wholly peculiar to that religion alone;
(2) that it consists primarily of a fourfold classification of people in general under the heads of Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaishya, and Sudra;
(3) that caste is perpetual and immutable, and has been transmitted from generation to generation throughout the ages of Hindu history and myth without the possibility of change.

To each of these points he believed there to be a convincing reply. Firstly, he argued, caste was more of a social than a religious institution, and that conversion from Hinduism to Islam has not necessarily the slightest effect upon caste. Secondly, he pointed out that there are Brahmins who are looked upon as outcasts by those who under the fourfold classification would be classed as Sudras, that there is no such thing as a Vaishya existing, it is very doubtful that there is such as thing as a Kshatriya, and that Sudra has no present significance save as a convenient term of abuse to apply to someone you consider lower than yourself. He finally concluded that nothing could be more variable and difficult to define than caste, and that 'the fact that a generation is descended from the ancestors of any given caste creates a presumption, and nothing more, that that generation also is of the same caste, a presumption liable to be defeated by an infinite variety of circumstances.' He

[15] J.C. Nesfield, *Brief View of the Caste System of the N.W.P. and Oudh*, (Allahabad, 1885); D.C.J. Ibbetson, *Report on the Census of Punjab, 1881*, vol. 1, (Calcutta: Govt. of India, 1883).

further went on to assert that castes were essentially guilds, and that a guild in its earliest form, was nothing less than a tribe, based on common descent. A great many caste divisions or sub-caste units, such as *gotras*, he then argued, were essentially tribal in origin.

Ibbetson was an administrator of immense experience, who later went on to become one of the more successful Chief Commissioners of the Central Provinces, a member of the Viceroy's Council under Curzon and finally the Lieutenant Governor of the Punjab, but his classification of castes, however logical and useful it might have proven, lacked a 'scientific' basis, as well as completely neglecting the problem of status. Equally importantly, J.C. Nesfield's uncompromising rejection of 'the modern doctrine which divides the population of India into Aryan and aboriginal' was unpopular, particularly his assertion that a stranger walking into the class rooms of the Sanskrit College at Benares 'would never dream of supposing' that the high caste students of that exclusive institution (as Risley put it) 'were distinct in race and blood from the scavengers who swept the road'.

Ibbetson's theories are today still widely admired. His ideas were enlarged upon in particular by the Cambridge anthropologists James Hutton (in the 1940's and '50's) and Edmund Leach (in the 1960's and '70's), and they have been cherished by successive generations of non-Marxist, non-Dumontian historians and anthropologists working in the classical British tradition of structural-functionalism, first established by Radcliffe Brown.[16] But however popular his ideas may have been in certain academic circles in more recent times, they sat awkwardly in the period in which they were first formulated, and arguments such as that of Nesfield, although they were a logical extension of the Ibbetson view, offended Victorian common sense, as well as the social prejudice of the educated English and Indian. The answer to this lay in the revival of 'pseudo-scientific' racism and the importation of new European techniques of anthropometry and racial classification.

THE EARLY ETHNOGRAPHY OF CENTRAL INDIAN 'TRIBES'

[16] See, for example, J.H. Hutton, *Caste in India: its nature, function and origins*, 4th edn., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), the first edn. pub. by Cambridge University Press in 1946, and S. Bayly in this volume. Edmund Leach's views on caste are succinctly expressed in E. Leach, 'Introduction: what should we mean by caste?' in *Aspects of Caste in South India, Ceylon and North-West Pakistan*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960). Leach suggests that caste might be regarded essentially as a benign division of labour designed to guarantee security of employment to the artisans and labouring class of the population - a naively harmonious view, little different from the description of English social structure to be found in the (now little used) third verse of the hymn 'All things Bright and Beautiful' by Mrs. Alexander, in which class ('the rich man in his castle, the poor man at his gate') is seen as ordained by God as a field of influence for patronage and Christian charity, like *jajmani*, the binding forces of Anglican society.

One of the first to exercise an interest in measuring skulls as a means of ethnic categorisation within India was William Sleeman. Sleeman served as district commissioner of Narsinghpur in the Saugor and Narmada Valley Territories in the 1820's, and after a period as the magistrate in Jabalpur, the capital of the territories, was appointed in 1835 as General Superintendent of the operations for the suppression of Thuggee - the dacoity conspiracy which he claimed to have unearthed during his period of service in Jabalpur. Sleeman was convinced, as were many of his contemporaries, that criminality was an inherited tendency, and that the Thugs, being a closely knit criminal conspiracy, with their own language, customs and religious beliefs (including the worship of the goddess Kali), as well as the custom of inter-marriage, could be regarded as virtually a separate caste or tribe.[17]

Sleeman's interest in skulls was not unusual as the study of phrenology was becoming increasingly popular at this time, with phrenological societies and museums being founded in a number of cities, including Edinburgh. One of the most famous was founded by George Combe, who published his influential *Essays on Phrenology* in 1819 and who founded the Phrenological Society in Edinburgh in the following year. In 1822 Ram Mohan Roy sent a selection of twelve 'Hindoo crania' to be examined by Dr. George Paterson, a member of the society, whose findings, published in the society's journal, edited by Combe, pointed to the conspicuous development of 'acquisitiveness and secretiveness' in the Hindu.[18] Sleeman may well have been moved by such observations into first enquiring into the subject and in 1832, following a request from a keen Scottish phrenologist, George Swinton (then Chief Secretary to the Government in India), he assisted Henry Spry, a young officer in the Bengal Medical Service stationed at Saugor, who forwarded seven of the skulls of convicted and executed Thugs, via Swinton, to Edinburgh for the purposes of study.[19] The skulls were accompanied by a paper from Dr.

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[17] W. Sleeman, *Ramaseeana, or A Vocabulary of the Peculiar Langage used by the Thugs...*, (Calcutta, 1836).

[18] Dr. George Murray Paterson, 'On the Phrenology of Hindostan', *Transactions of the Phrenological Society*, (Edinburgh, 1824), pp. 430-448. 'How, then, is this greater cerebral development manifested by the mind of the Hindoo? I might answer this question in a very few words, by replying, that Hindoo is only another term for falsehood, and that love of money is his darling propensity' (ibid., p. 443). Observations on the 'secretiveness' of the Hindu were incorporated into later editions of Combe's *Essays on Phrenology*: see G. Combe, *Elements of Phrenology*, 9th edition, (Edinburgh 1862), pp. 75-77. Interestingly, the skull of Ram Mohan Roy himself was later studied by the Edinburgh phrenologists, following his death in Bristol in 1833. His skull was found to be larger than the average, thus accounting for his 'force and dignity of character'. This was very fortunate since, as Combe confessed, 'had the brain of Rammohun Roy been of diminutive size, the circumstances would have done more to extinguish Phrenology than the whole amount of misrepresentation and abuse which it has been doomed to endure': 'On the life, character, opinions and cerebral development of Raja Rammohun Roy', *Transactions of the Phrenological Society*, vol. VIII, no. XL, (Edinburgh, 1834), pp. 577-603.

[19] Skulls of Blacks and aboriginals in Australia were commonly being collected for phrenological purposes by the late 1820's, see for example I. Duffield, 'The life and death of "Black" John Goff...' *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 22, 1 (1987), p.36. See also P. Fryer, *Staying Power: the history of Black*

Spry, describing the occupation and characters of the Thugs, which was subsequently published in the *Transactions of the Phrenological Society*, together with remarks on the skulls themselves by Robert Cox. Not surprisingly Cox's analysis of the skulls, all smaller than 'the European average', confirmed the interpretation of the original owners' characters suggested by Spry, there being noted an exaggeration of the 'organs of the animal propensities' (including Secretiveness) by comparison with the 'organs of moral sentiments' (such as Benevolence) and that 'Veneration and Love of Approbation', apparently a weakness of all 'Hindoos', reinforced amongst these specimens the obvious propensity to 'Destructiveness and Acquisitiveness'. Taking his cue from Paterson, Cox also found the Thugs to exhibit the characteristics of Philoprogenitiveness and Adhesiveness ('manifested in the Hindoos in the happiness they seem to feel when surrounded by their children...and in their frequent and ardent embraces'), as well as the usual tendency of Hindus to jealousy, polygamy and 'unnatural desires'. Beyond such observations however there was little attempt at theorisation or detail.[20]

More sophisticated racial theories about Indian castes and tribes nonetheless developed rapidly in this period. Although the fully-fledged discourse of Indian castes and tribes was not yet apparent, already by the 1830's largely Brahminical ideas were being applied and observed differences of appearance were being recorded. The idea of a racial difference existing between northern Indians and southern Indians and between high castes and low castes was first mooted in the late eighteenth century by Sir William Jones, but his theories, particularly that of the so-called 'Aryan invasion' were only weakly supported by linguistic and archaeological evidence: they had not yet received any other 'scientific' proof, and had not yet achieved widespread popular acceptance.[21] Still going on at this time was the contest between the scholarly and the reductive models of Indian society, publicly displayed in the great debates between those whom contemporaries referred to as the 'Orientalists' and the Utilitarians, it being the latter who increasingly monopolised decision-making positions in the Indian Civil Service. Nonetheless, even amongst those not yet immediately party to these debates an elemental form of racism had already developed, particularly concerning the tribals - the section of the population about which the British were least informed and felt they had most to fear.

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peoples in Britain, (London, 1984), pp. 167-171, for a description of early attempts at racial theorisation using phrenology in the U.K.

20 Henry Harpur Spry, 'Some account of the gang-murderers of Central India, commonly called Thugs; accompanying the skulls of seven of them and remarks on the skulls and characters of the Thugs by Robert Cox', *Transactions of the Phrenological Society*, vol. VII, no. XL, (Edinburgh, 1834), pp. 577-603.

21 Interestingly the scientific proof of the 'Aryan invasion' has still not been found, whilst the archaeological and linguistic evidence for it has been seriously contested: see Colin Renfrew, *Archaeology and Language: the puzzle of Indo-European origins*, (London: Peregrine, 1987); also Léon Poliakov, *The Aryan Myth: a history of racist and nationalist ideas in Europe*, (London, 1975).

As Brahminical theories of Indian society gradually became more widely accepted amongst British officials, so was the imagined 'tribal' increasingly reified as the natural antithesis of the Brahmin. Not only did the 'tribal' or the 'Dravidian' provide the most obvious test-bed for theories of racial difference, but once accepted as separate races the degree of miscegenation between indigenous tribals and 'Aryan' Brahmins then afforded an immediate, if intuitive, explanation for the proliferation of intermediate castes. Speculative observations of this sort were often first made in the jungle fastnesses of central India.

The sanguinary nature of early contacts with the tribals, or adivasis, of central India did not bode well for their future reputation. The first expedition into Bastar by Captain Blunt, in 1795, was attacked and expelled from the country, from which experience may be traced some of the more fearful accounts of the savagery of tribal Gonds.[22] The already established reputations of the predatory Bhils of Gujarat and the rebellious Santhals and Kols of Bihar also served to colour the expectations of early travellers in central India. Hindu informants often reported the adivasis to be practitioners of human sacrifice and this was widely believed, although no evidence of this was ever uncovered.[23] The density of the jungle and the prevalence of malaria further made any expedition into the interior something to be greatly feared. The very first such expedition, that of Alexander Elliot and four other officers, who attempted to march a route from Cuttack to Nagpur and thence to Hoshangabad between August 11th and December 9th 1778, ended in the death of Elliot and three of the other four. Only one, Thomas, actually made it to Hoshangabad, and on the return journey was considerably harassed by tigers, robbers and 'a treacherous Naig [sic]'.[24] In later expeditions however expectations were not always confirmed. The large number of Hindus, including Rajputs and 'agricultural Brahmins' resident in Chhattisgarh and the surrounding tracts was noted with surprise, and the customs and practices of the Gonds were discovered to be not always as bizarre as had previously been described. One expedition of the early 1830's reported: 'It has been suspected by many that the Gonds do not scruple to perform human sacrifices and devour the flesh, but the Hindoo inhabitants whom we questioned exonerated them from the charge of cannibalism. The Gonds whom

[22] J.T. Blunt, 'Narrative of a route from Chinargur to Yentragoodum...1795', in *Early European Travellers in the Nagpur Territories*, (Nagpur: Govt. Press, 1930).

[23] Dr. Henry Spry firmly believed that in the 'wild And unreclaimed hill jungles' of central India '...they sacrifice and eat their fellow-creatures. The fact of their doing so is so well attested that there can be no doubt of its correctness': H. Spry, *Modern India*, vol. II, (London, 1837), p. 138.

[24] NAI, Survey of India memoirs and field books: M320, Elliot Mission; M272, Route from Cuttack to Nagpur and thence to Hoosingabad, by Wm. Campbell 1778; M163, Route from Nagpur to Cuttack 1782, by Thomas (diary of events). See also C.U. Wills, *British relations with the Nagur State in the 18th century*, (Nagpur, 1926), which contains extensive quotations from Survey records and embassies of this period.

we met with, far from showing any symptoms of cannibalism, even abstain from beef. The lower classes have no objections to other kinds of animal food, although the chiefs and better sort of folk have adopted the prejudices of the Hindu in this respect.'[25]

Richard Jenkins, in his report on the Nagpur territories formed the impression that while the wildest of the Gonds, the Murias of Bastar, engaged in human sacrifice, the majority of Gonds 'class themselves under the second cast [sic] of Hindoos'. This, he wrote, 'is a stretch of complaisance in the Marhatta [sic] officers, owing, probably, to the country having been so long under the Rajahs of the Gond tribe. They, however, term themselves Coetoor (a corruption of Khutriya).'[26] This account, attributing Gonds with the status of Kshatriyas, almost certainly arose from Jenkins' encounter with the Gond Rajah of Deogurh in Nagpur, a Hinduised 'Raj Gond', who was then still nominally sovereign over a large part of the Rajah of Nagpore's territory and still received a share of the state's revenues.[27] His confusion well illustrates the uncertainty of many writers in this period, but his distinction between more 'civilised' tribals and those 'others' of whom little is known but who were suspected of the most heinous savagery is also to be found in the account written by Vans Agnew at this time, concerning the Subah or Province of Chhattisgrah:

> ' The only tribes I heard of that are peculiar to this part of India are the Kaonds, or inhabitants of Koandwana [Gondwana], Kakair [Kanker], and Bustar, and Binderwa and Pardeea casts found in the hills North-East of Ruttunpore....The Koands are Hindoos and not particularly distinguished from the wild inhabitants of other jungles, except by the high character they are reputed to possess for veracity and fidelity...The Binderwas reside in Hilly and Woody Country near Ruttunpore, particularly in the Koorba and Sirgooja Hills, and much resemble the wild savages who have been described as met with in other parts of India. They appear to be so seldom seen by the other inhabitants of the Country that there is much reason to doubt

25 IOR (Map Room), Routes in the Central Provinces, MSS 36: Report on the route from Chunargarh to Amarkant by Lts. Waugh and Renny (1833) The belief that the Gonds practiced human sacrifice was one of the most potent myths of this period. Although no evidence was ever found the allegation was frequently repeated up and until the administration of Bastar came directly under the control of the British in 1911. The issues involved are discussed in C. Bates, ' "The invention of perdition": human sacrifice and British relations with the Indian kingdom of Bastar in the 19th century' and 'Dasehra and revolt: problems of legitimacy in 20th century Bastar', unpublished papers presented at the Centre d'Études de l'Inde et de l'Asie du Sud in the Maison des Sciences de l'Homme in Paris, April 1992.

26 R. Jenkins, *Report on the Territories of the Rajah of Nagpore*, (Calcutta, 1827), p.29. Jenkins also noted that 'the different tribes divide themselves, like their Hindu neighbours, into twelve and a half castes; and these, again, branch out into subdivisions, denominated according to the number of the Penates, or household gods' (p.30).

27 See Jenkins, *Report on the Territories of the Rajah of Nagpore*, p. 140 et seq. Apparently the Gond Rajah still gave the Tika, or mark of royalty, to the Bhonsla princes on their accession to the Gaddi (or throne) and was entitled to put his seal on certain revenue papers.

> the truth of all that is reported respecting them. They are, however, said to have scarcely any religion; but if they regard any idol, Daby [Debi] has the preference. They go entirely naked; are armed with Bows and Arrows; never build any huts or seek other shelter than that afforded by the Jungles; but sometimes cultivate small quantities of the coarse grains; are said to destroy their relatives when too old to move about and to eat their flesh, when a great entertainment takes place to which all the family is invited. Their enemies, and the travellers they may slay, they are also said to eat. It is doubtful that they have the ceremony of marriage.'[28]

Descriptions broadly in sympathy with those of Agnew are to be found in William Temple's *Report on the Zamindaris and other Petty Chieftaincies in the Central Provinces in 1863*, although in this and in other reports of the very first Chief Commissioner of the Central Provinces a tendency was shown to dwell on the economic potentialities rather than the savageries of the newly acquired territories.[29]Other accounts of the period continued the anecdotal-cum-scholarly ethnographic mode of enquiry, a good example being the *Papers Relating to the Aboriginal Tribes of the Central Provinces* by the Reverend Stephen Hislop, a missionary of the Free Church of Scotland, based in Nagpur, which was published posthumously in 1866. Hislop referred to the Gonds as a race, but his detailed description of them contains no anthropometric evidence and few descriptions of their physical characteristics. Hislop expounds the theory that there are distinct races of 'Kolarian' and 'Dravidian' tribes, and he notes the similarities between Gondi and the Telugu and Tamil languages, and speculates that the 'Kolarian' tribes of the Satpura hills may be related to the Karens and other tribal peoples of Burma and Malaysia. Beyond that however he confines himself largely to his professional interests and to descriptions of Gond customs and religious beliefs, the information having been gleaned during his missionary activities with the assistance of a number of 'native Christian' informants.[30]

Thus, although notions of racial difference and of the distinctive characteristics of so-called 'castes' and 'tribes' were becoming established, no-one had yet attempted to actually measure, codify and normalise these differences in anything other than anecdotal or

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28 P.Vans Agnew, *Report on the Subah or Province of Chhattisgarh*, written in 1820, (Nagpur, 1920), p.5.

29 For example Temple's extremely up-beat *Report on the River Godavery and it's Feeders*, (Nagpur, 1863). reprints of both of these reports, made in the 1920's, are available in the MPCRO, Nagpur.

30 R. Temple (ed.), *Papers Relating to the Aboriginal Tribes of the Central Provinces Left in MSS by the Late Revd. Stephen Hislop*, (Nagpur, 1866). In his introduction gives his characteristically paternalist view of the Gonds and other adivasis: 'There is much in the character of these tribes to attract British sympathies. They are honest and truth-telling; they are simple-minded; though superstitious, they are yet free from fanaticism; they have great physical endurance. Their courage is remarkable; the instance is freshly remembered in the Chhindwara District, where an English officer was saved from instant death in the grip of a panther by the bravery of a Gond hunter: and still more recently, a wounded officer on the Godavery was rescued from the wild beasts by his native hunter' (p. vii). Less favourably though, Hislop himself recounts descriptions of human sacrifice elsewhere in the text (p. 16).

religious terms. The need for some such codification however was becoming pressingly obvious. A number of live specimens of Indian subjects were displayed at the Great Exhibition in London in 1851, and soon after this the Governor-General in India, Lord Canning, commissioned a large-scale photographic survey of *The People of India*, eventually to see the light of day in eight volumes published between 1868 and 1875.[31] At about the same time the Schlagintweit brothers were also commissioned to make a series of life casts of Indian subjects, their survey of the interior of India and of the Himalayan region being completed between 1854 and 1858. But a proposal by Dr. Joseph Frayer in 1867 that the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal should set up a living ethnological exhibition was apparently never acted upon.[32] Officials and part-time ethnologists in the Central Provinces, however, were less inhibited. In 1866-67 an Exhibition was held at Jubbulpore, modelled on the Great Exhibition at Crystal Palace in 1851, at which live specimens were displayed.

The Central Provinces was seized from the Bhonsle Rajas of Nagpur in 1854 (according to the notorious policy of Lapse), but since the insurrection of 1857 had then shortly after intervened, an administrative system independent of that of the North West Provinces had not been properly established until 1861. The Jubbulpore exhibition was thus the first real opportunity to take stock of this, the largest new territory to be acquired since the conquest of the Punjab in 1841. Samples of produce, archaeological finds and handicrafts were brought to Jubbulpore from all over the Central Provinces, together with live examples of the various 'aboriginal tribes' that were judged to be characteristic of the different parts of the territory. The idea of having examples of aborigines at the exhibition was inspired by a circular of the Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1866, detailing information that was being sought by ethnologists concerning the aboriginal tribes of India. Using this memorandum as their model an Ethnological Committee was then established under the Chairmanship of A.C. Lyall to examine the 'aboriginals' and their findings were subsequently published. Excluded from the study were all 'races' or 'castes' which were judged to be immigrants to the territory. Also excluded were religious 'sects' such as the Satnamis and Kabirpanthis, and all 'manufacturing and trading classes', even if originating from tribal areas. Instead the focus was on the 'Inferior and Helot' tribes, the 'Wandering Tribes' such as as the 'Mangs', and (principally) the 'waifs and relics of aboriginal tribes' to be found in the thickly wooded hills in the heart of the Provinces. Following George Campbell's recently

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[31] C. Pinney, 'Colonial anthropology in the "Laboratory of Mankind" ', in C.A. Bayly (ed.), *The Raj*, (London, 1991), p. 252-263. See also John Falconer, 'Photography in the nineteenth century' in the same volume, pp. 264-277.
[32] Pinney, *op. cit.*, p. 254.

published ethnological paper,[33] the 'aboriginals' were divided into Kolarians (Kols, Bheels, Korkoos, Bygahs etc.) and Dravidians (Gonds, 'Hulba Gonds', Khonds, Kois etc.). Significantly, after the briefest of descriptions from respective divisional commissioners, the recording of manners and customs by interview, and of the specimens' habitat, name, age, parentage, and sex, by far the bulk of the report was devoted to measurements: measurements of height, length of upper arm, lower arm, thigh, and leg, breadth of chest and body, colour of skin, eyes, pupils, beard and moustache, length or other peculiarity of heel, any other physical peculiarities, and diet.[34]

At the end of the exhibition, a museum was established at Nagpur to house the more important of the exhibits, including, reportedly, clay models of some of the 'aboriginals'.[35] But nonetheless, despite the thoroughness of the work conducted by the Ethnological Committee there is little said about the results of their enquiry in the *Gazetteer of the Central Provinces*, written and edited by Charles Grant and published in 1870. Beyond noting that the Committee had concluded that there were twenty-three 'certain' (13 Kolarian and 10 Dravidian) and six 'doubtful' aboriginal races, there is little reproduction of the anthropometric findings of the Committee. The bulk of the introductory entry on aboriginals in fact relies on Hislop's and Campbell's racial speculations, with only a minimal leavening of descriptive observation. Grant observes that Kurkus are 'mostly black, with flat faces and high cheek-bones', that among the Baigas 'the purest of the race in the Eastern Forests of Mandla approach in feature to the aquiline Aryan type and as a rule...are above the Gonds in stature', and writes of the 'savage straightforwardness of speech' of the 'Dhur-Gonds' at the very bottom of the Gond community, who nonetheless are still possessed of 'the stalwart limbs and contempt of fear, which are characteristic of the race... and render Gonds useful tools in employment'. But generally Grant is more interested in unquantified speculation about the date of the Aryan invasion and the persistence of 'serpent-worship' amongst the Gonds of Chhattisgarh. This is probably, as confessed in the preface to the volume, due to the C.P. Gazetteer being largely completed before receipt of W.W. Hunters' famous circular commissioning the production of

[33] G. Campbell, *The Ethnology of India*, (1865). Campbell was a civil commissioner in Oudh in the early 1860's, where he first acquired his reputation as a champion of tenants' rights. He went on to serve as Chief Commissioner of the Central Provinces from 1867 to 1868 and as Lieutenant Governor of Bengal from 1871 to 1874. He was a regular contributor of ethnographic articles to the Calcutta-based *Journal of the Bengal Asiatic Society* and the *Quarterly Ethnological Journal.*

[34] *Report of the Ethnological Committee on Papers laid before them and upon examination of specimens of Aboriginal tribes brought to the Jubbulpore Exhibition of 1866-67*, (Nagpur, 1868).

[35] Clay models of central Indian 'aboriginal races' were also sent to the International Exhibition held in London in 1874 - see MPCRO, Letters to the Govt. of India, 1874, No. 2265/97: J.W. Chisholm, Offg. Sec. to CCCP to GOI, Dept. Agri., Rev. and Commerce.

Gazetteers for each and every province and district of the empire, a circular which laid particular stress on the need for careful empirical and statistical observation. [36]

The lack of precision seen in the first C.P. Gazetteer was, however, repeated again in the census of 1872 - by far the least structured census ever conducted in the subcontinent and a printer's nightmare, since rather than fit the population into pre-determined categories census takers asked relatively open-ended questions about religious beliefs and occupations. The result was a proliferation of columns concerning occupations in particular. Individuals appeared as 'con-man', 'pimp', 'prostitute', 'idiot' and 'thief, or however else they might appear or describe themselves. Worse still, castes and tribes were listed as to whether they were 'animist', Christian, Hindu or Mohammedan, with little structure or system beyond the self-representation of the respondents. The need for some such order led to Denzil Ibbetson's functional, occupational categorisation of castes and tribes in the 1881 census. But not only did this allow for the possibility of unhealthily egalitarian conclusions about the ethnic mixing of the Indian population, and the possibilities for change in economic and social status, but it also directly conflicted with the racist ideas about Indian social structure that had by then been largely confirmed in the minds of administrators by more than a generation of anecdotal writing. The response was to seek for a new method that would confirm 'scientifically' what were now ingrained prejudices. The immanent discourse of pseudo-scientific racism had already shown itself in early experiments in phrenology, and in the techniques of physical measurement attempted at the Jubbulpore exhibition. A major breakthrough was not possible however until the introduction to India of new European techniques of anthropometry, first tried out, at the instigation of Sir Herbert Hope Risley, in the Ethnographic Survey of Bengal.

HERBERT HOPE RISLEY AND THE APOTHEOSIS OF 'PSEUDO-SCIENTIFIC' RACISM

Risley's first experience of survey work was as an Assistant Director of Statistics in Sir W.W. Hunter's Survey of India, the results of which were embodied in the first edition of the Imperial Gazetteer, published in 1881. His interest in anthropology however largely developed after his marriage to an erudite German woman in 1879, who introduced him to a wide range of European writings on anthropology and statistics. In 1885 he was then placed in charge of the Ethnographic Survey of Bengal, a project which occupied him for the next six years.

[36] C. Grant (ed.), *Gazetteer of the Central Provinces*, (Nagpur, 1870), pp. cv-cxxvii. Grant's response to W.W. Hunter's circular was to hurriedly append a dozen pages of somewhat unreliable area, population and revenue statistics to the very end of his gazetteer.

Preliminary anthropometric data on the people of eastern Bengal, consisting of measurements of skin colour, skull size, orbito-nasal indices and overall stature had already been compiled by a Dr. James Wise, and this was combined with E.T. Dalton's work on the tribes of Chota Nagpur[37] to produce a four-volume dictionary of the Tribes and Castes of Bengal, which was finally published in 1891. Two out of the four volumes consisted of anthropometric data, a considerable proportion of which Risley had collected himself.[38]

The maximum sample size used in Risley's enquiry was 100, and in many cases Risley's conclusions about the racial origins of particular castes or tribal groups were based on the cranial measurements of as few as 30 individuals. Like Professor Topinard, Paul Broca, Le Bron and Morton before him, Risley had a clear notion of where his results would lead, and he had no difficulty in fitting the fewest observations into a complex typology of racial types.

According to Risley the people of India were composed of seven basic racial types: the Mongoloid, the Dravidian, the Indo-Aryan, the Turko-Iranian, the Mongolo-Dravidian, the Aryo-Dravidian, and the Scytho-Dravidian. Each group was the result of incursions by different racial types into the subcontinent, the Scythians arriving from central Asia sometime in the 2nd millenium, and sweeping down the west coast, and the Aryans arriving shortly after. The Mongoloid and the Dravidian races were the original inhabitants of north-eastern India and the Dravidians the original inhabitants of the south, and with these races the invading peoples sometimes mixed, and sometimes, apparently, not. Most of those thought to be tribals were described as being of Dravidian or Mongolian stock, whilst the agricultural or peasant classes of north India were either of mixed stock, or were Aryan in origin. All this Risley believed could be proven by the simple act of measurement, though he admitted that his own evidence, at best, suggested only a three-fold racial division between Aryan, Mongoloid and Dravidian. (Similar arguments about the racial origins of castes were espoused by non-Brahman propagandists for quite different reasons in the late nineteenth century but, as with Risley, these theories were more to do with the appropriation of knowledge for political ends than the product of disinterested scholarship).[39]

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[37] E.T. Dalton, *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal*, (Calcutta, 1872) [later republished as *Tribal History of Eastern India.*]

[38] Risley, H.H., 'Introduction' and 'Ethnographic Appendices', *Census of India, 1901*, vol. I, (Calcutta: Government of India, 1903).

[39] For the importance of these debates, (particularly the theory of Aryan invasion) in the emergent ideology of late nineteenth century Hindu reform movements see R. O'Hanlon, *Caste, Conflict and Identity*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), ch. 8.

Risley also believed that the basic linguistic divisions of the Indian subcontinent could be traced back to racial origins, and wrote: 'the gobbling speech of the people of Chittagong and Eastern Bengal, and their inability to negotiate certain consonants seem to suggest that their original tongue belonged to the Tibeto-Burman family, and that their vocal apparatus must differ materially from that of their western neighbours'.[40] It was views such as these that led Max Mueller to denounce what he described as the 'unholy alliance' between comparative philology and ethnology that lay behind the ethnographic survey. Risley however dismissed Mueller's criticisms as merely a matter of detail and went on to pursue his belief that the custom of endogamy amongst certain caste groups meant that even the minutest social distinction could, in time, be traced to some difference in physiognomy, skin colour or bone structure. He thus asserted:

> 'if we take a series of castes in Bengal, Bihar and the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh, or Madras, and arrange them in the order of the average nasal index, so that the caste with finest nose shall be at the top, and that with the coarsest at the bottom of the list, it will be found that this order substantially corresponds with the accepted order of social precedence.' [41]

Risley was highly dismissive of cultural and linguistic indicators since 'the wholesale borrowing of customs and ceremonies...makes it practically impossible to arrive at any certain conclusions by examining these practices' [42]. However the simultaneous publication of Dr. George Grierson's Linguistic Survey of India seemed nonetheless, and very fortunately, to bear out his results. This was no coincidence, since Grierson himself was armed with the much earlier but as yet unproven hypotheses of Sir William Jones concerning matters of language and race, and was intimately acquainted with Risley's theories of racial origins. Grierson also followed a similar *ex ante* deductive methodology in his research.

Like Risley's caste categories, Grierson's linguistic categories were pre-selected and the grammar and vocabulary of the languages then ascertained by circulating for translation the parable of the prodigal son: the fatted calf being discreetly changed to a fatted goat to avoid offending religious prejudices. 'Authoritative' translations of this parable, together with a list of common words and phrases, was then used to define the boundaries of the main linguistics groups. However, Grierson's sources were merely the opinion of 'local intelligent persons' who were asked to name the languages of their neighbourhood. Thus,

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[40] H.H. Risley, *The People of India*, 2nd edn., (London, 1915), p. 9

[41] ibid, p. 29

[42] ibid, p.20

Grierson wrote, 'we are told that Bengali is spoken in such and such a place, but we are not told what is meant by the word "Bengali" '.[43]

A common victim of this methodology was the great variety of local tribal dialects and languages in central India, which were simply lumped together under the title 'Gondi' - meaning, whatever was unintelligible to the educated informant. The Survey was thus not so very different from earlier dictionaries, such as Sleeman's *Ramaseeana*, or Meninski's dictionary of Persian, or dictionaries of the 'secret languages' of the criminal tribes, all of which were highly arbitrary collections of linguistic information, which were needed to achieve administrative ends, but which did not necessarily reflect the authentic language of any particular community.

Following the success of the Ethnographic Survey of Bengal a scheme for the systematic survey of the whole of India was sanctioned in 1901. A Superintendent of Ethnography was appointed for each Presidency or Province, and an allotment of £ 5,000 provided to every Presidency each year for a period of eight years in order to carry out the work.[44]

The data for these surveys was collected by the circulation of questionnaires to local government officers, and secondly by the physical measurement of the population in the manner prescribed by Risley. Few of the later surveys however were quite so thorough, even by Risley's standards. One of the most ludicrous was Thurston's study of southern India. Thurston was the curator of the government museum in Madras, and clearly saw the study of racial types among the Indians as an extension of his daily routine of labelling and pinning butterflies and of collecting and categorising the varieties of plants.

Like Risley, Thurston was convinced of the distinctness of racial types, and was convinced that several of the tribes of southern India, who were of the race 'Homo Dravida' (as he called it), had more in common with Australian aboriginals than their Aryan or high caste neighbours. The use of the boomerang by Kallan and Maravan warriors in South India he believed to be convincing evidence of this, whilst the

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[43] G. Grierson, *Linguistic Survey of India*, vol. 1, (Calcutta, 1898), introduction.

[44] In the Central Provinces the commission was given to R.V. Russell, the Superintendent of Ethnography for the C.P. and Rai Bahadur Hira Lal, an amateur archaeologist and extra assistant commissioner. Extracts from the resolution of the government of India are given in an appendix to this paper. It is noticeable that Lord George Hamilton, the Secretary of State for India, suggested at the time that in addition to photographs being taken of 'representatives of the different Indian races', 'archaic industries' should be similarly recorded.(see MPCRO, Berar, Miscellaneous Dept. 10/190, enclosure 2). This second proposal was eventually dropped, only to be revived and brought to fulfillment by Mrs. Indira Gandhi in the Indian Crafts Museum in New Delhi (see P. Greenhough, 'Tradition, economy and nation at the Indian crafts museum, New Delhi', unpublished seminar paper, Centre of South Asian Studies, University of Edinburgh, November 1992).

prevalence of tree-climbing amongst the Kadirs of the Anamalai hills, as amongst the Dayaks of Borneo, he clearly believed to indicate that both shared some previous evolutionary origin.

Armed with a similar 'boite anthropometrique' to that used by Risley - as recommended by Professor Topinard of Paris, and loaned for the occasion by the Asiatic Society of Bengal - Thurston would set off in search of suitable subjects in order to carry out his measurements. In doing this he relied heavily on his authority as a government officer, there sometimes being no other way, for example, that he could persuade a bewildered villager to strip in order to be measured with the mysterious-sounding 'Lovibond Tintometer'. Sometimes, however, Thurston's methods would backfire on him. Having attracted villagers to his camp by playing a phonograph and giving an exhibition of 'American pseudoptics' (or illusions) they would sometimes nonetheless flee in all directions as soon as he produced his measuring instruments. On other occasions the numbers attending the camp would be so great that he was only able to carry out the most cursory of measurements.

Whole villages sometimes fled in advance of his arrival, and the Boer war having just finished, many took him to be a recruiting sergeant for the army, the bodily measurements being required, it was thought, in order to provide them with uniforms. Others thought that the marks that Thurston made on their foreheads 'to indicate the position of the fronto-nasal suture and bi-orbital breadth' would blister into a number, which would then serve as future identification for the purpose of kidnapping. Others still took the height-measuring platform for a gallows, or believed Thurston to be selecting the finest of them to be stuffed as exhibits for the Madras Museum - a thought which one suspects was not impossibly far from his mind. Despite all these obstacles, Thurston managed to complete his survey, but his conclusions were based on the measurement of only 30 or 60 members of each caste or tribe, and in some cases measurements had been taken from only 6 or 7 individuals.[45]

By the time of the last ethnographic survey, that of the Central Provinces and Berar, which was published in 1916, anthropometry had begun to fall out of favour, and the authors - Russell and Hira Lal - relied much more heavily on folk tales and other anecdotal evidence, as did Risley's principal rival and critic at this time William Crooke, the author

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[45] E. Thurston (assisted by K. Rangachari), *The Tribes and Castes of South India*, 7 vols., (Madras, 1909), vol. 1, introduction. Edgar Thurston was also a 'Correspondent Etranger' of the Société d'Anthropologie de Paris. To get a real sense of his often lurid, orientalist imaginings the best source is his *Ethnographic Notes in Southern India*, (Madras, 1906), which is complete with hook-swinging, fire-walking, earth-eating and human sacrifice, in a style that is most revealing.

of *The Tribes and Castes of the North-West Provinces of India*.[46] The basic caste categories of the survey, however, still replicated that in the companion volumes by Thurston, Risley and Enthoven.[47] In the case of Russell and Hira Lal, the definition of caste remained essentially racial, but instead of being based on measurement (although such 'facts' were known to be available) an explanation was sought, once more, in Vedic texts, their principal authority being M. Emile Senart's *Les Castes dans l'Inde*. From this source Russell and Hira Lal reasoned that the tribals could probably be identified as the Rakshasas (or devils) described in the Mahabharata, and were therefore an entirely distinct community, the Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas were Aryan invaders, and the Sudras were the original inhabitants of South Asia, reduced by them to a subordinate role. Thus although occupational descriptions were used, particularly in distinguishing the different ranks of Aryans, the hierarchy remained extreme (and definitively racial) in a form that was still probably unrecognisable to most participants in the social system itself at this time.[48] In this way, although Risley's anthropometry had become unfashionable his views persisted.[49] Even as far as racial anthropometry was concerned it merely had to compete with the emergence of social and cultural perspectives in the field of anthropology, pioneered by Franz Boas, which although influential in the United States, made but slow headway in Europe and the colonial territories. In the field of criminology there was little to compete with Cesare Lombroso's theories on inherited criminality until the 1930's. Anthropometry thus continued to be used in the Police Department as a means of identifying criminals until the introduction of the Berthillon system of finger-printing, firstly in Bengal and then in Berar, in 1897. Even then finger-printing was only adopted

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[46] R.V. Russell, R.V. and Hira Lal, *The Castes and Tribes of the Central Provinces*, (London, 1916); W. Crooke, *The Tribes and Castes of the North-West Provinces and Oudh*, 4 vols., (Calcutta, 1896). See also W. Crooke, *An Ethnograhpic Handbook for the N.W.P. & Oudh* (Allahabad, 1890); W. Crooke, *The North-Western Provincs of India: their History*, Ethnology and Administration, (London, 1897); and W. Crooke, *Natives of Northern India*, (Delhi, 1907). It is notable that Crooke was also responsible for editing the reprinted version of Col. Tod's romantic historical and anecdotal account of Rajasthan, originally published in the late 1820's: J. Tod, *Annals and antiquities of Rajasthan, or the Central and Western Rajput States of India*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1920).

[47] R.E. Enthoven, *The Tribes and Castes of Bombay*, (Bombay, 1920). Enthoven's work in turn depended heavily on the compendious but unsystematic ethnographic researches of Sir James Campbell, conducted over a period twenty years in preparation for the publication of the thirty-four volumes of *Bombay Gazetteers* in 1901, to which Enthoven himself appended an index volume.

[48] The highly anecdotal basis of the Russell & Hira Lal volumes is well illustrated by the entry on 'Thugs' in volume 4, pp. 558-587, which is replete even with references to the ill-omen incurred if the turban of a thug should happen to catch fire, substantiated with cross-references to James Fraser's *Golden Bough*. The entry on 'Gonds' also faithfully reproduces, without qualification, nineteenth century descriptions of the practice of human sacrifice in Bastar and other territories.

[49] For years after Risleys retiral, books such as Bishop Eyre Chatterton's *The Story of Gondwana*, (London, 1916) faithfully reproduced Risley's ideas on the racial origins of Indian castes and tribes, together with all the other paraphanalia of 19th century orientalist discourse on India, including the great myths of Thuggee and human sacrifice, whilst to this day reports of the Anthropological Survey of India continue to appear with some form of introductory exegesis on 'the seven races' of India: e.g. V. Bhall, 'Prospects of Seriological Studies in India', in Hirendra K. Rakshit (ed.), *Anthropology in India, volume 2: Physical Anthropology*, (Calcutta: Anthropological Survey of India, 1976), pp. 144-164.

because of the saving it afforded in labour, time and expense, and anthropometric records continued to be compiled for some time in tandem with finger-printing.[50] With modifications, the Criminal Tribes legislation also remained in force and was still being used actively in the Central Provinces and elsewhere in the late 1930's.[51]

Risley himself continued to enjoy a distinguished career. Besides working as Census Commissioner in 1899, he also served on a Commission appointed to enquire into the working of the Indian Police, and in 1909, he became a temporary member of the Governor-General's Council.[52] He was also three times President of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, and upon returning to England was appointed to succeed C.J. Lyall as Judicial & Public Secretary in the India Office, as well as being elected President of the Royal Anthropological Institute, before his death in 1911.

CONTEMPORARY CONCEPTS OF 'TRIBE': AFRICA & INDIA COMPARED

Modern anthropological thought, influenced by the latest developments in biology such as the concept of the cline and the mathematical theory of population genetics, has largely overthrown the notions of race developed by Risley and others in the late nineteenth century. Indeed the view of present-day geneticists is that *homo sapiens* probably originated in Africa and that as a consequence the genetic diversity between Africans (for example between a Zulu and a Masai) is many times greater than that between Africans and Europeans, or even between Europeans and Chinese.[53] Together with the theory of race, African anthropologists have also long since rejected the concept of the tribe. Both phenomena, when examined closely, reveal a variety of genetic and social processes at work, but few of these processes follow one another with sufficient consistency to merit a unitary form of ranking. Any classification of race, or social grouping, in this way, including the traditional notions of 'tribe' are, in effect, wholly arbitrary.

In the African context, Aidan Southall has cleverly debunked a number of such traditional usages. There are, of course, numerous instances of self-identification by certain groups, however an extraordinary number of ethnic or communal associations have either evolved

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50 MPCRO, Berar Police department, 1898/36: 'Substitution of the system of identification by finger prints for that of anthropometry'.

51 See BP, Police Department, 1936/18-1: 'Rules Framed under the Criminal Tribes Act, 1924': a file which details the notification of a number of newly criminalised tribes in the Berar region.

52 As Home Minister under Lord Curzon Risley is remembered particularly (though not very fondly) for his part in the partition of Bengal.

53 It has also been said that most Black Americans are now genetically closer to Europeans than to their African ancestors, due to extensive miscegenation, and that many white Europeans are probably more genetically similar to modern-day African populations.

in response to external pressures, or have been directly imposed. In such cases the history of 'tribes' tells us more about the powerful and the elite than about the subject peoples themselves. A well documented case is that of the Luyia in Kenya. Before the 1930s the region described by Europeans as 'kavirondo' contained as many as seventeen different tribes, but the creation of the North Kavirondo district, later renamed the North Nyanza district, rapidly encouraged the formation of political associations such as the North Kavirondo Central Association and the Bantu Kavirondo Taxpayer's Association. In order to associate themselves with these organisations, and to conform to the new administrative boundaries, the seventeen tribes quickly adopted the one name - of Luyia. The choice of this name was easy enough, as roughly translated it refers to the meeting place of the elders in nearly all the languages of the region. Other, so-called tribal names, such as Sukuma and Nyamwezi in Tanzania, refer simply to geographical locations: the Sukuma being 'northerners' and the Nyamwezi 'westerners'. There were in fact at one time more than a dozen different ruling families among the Sukuma and Nyamwezi, each with its own 'chiefdom' or 'kingdom'.[54] Other tribal names simply refer to people who live in a common habitat, such as the bush, the valley, or the jungle, and these people need not necessarily share any common social or cultural characteristics.

The association of people by language is, finally, an even less helpful criterion of tribe, since language is an element that groups within acephalous societies often deliberately manipulate as a means of distinction and identification. Larger tribal polities, such as the kingdom of the Ahom in Assam, have also often incorporated a number of other groups by conquest or assimilation and in consequence include a variety of languages. In India it is not unusual in some localities for half-a-dozen different dialects or languages to be spoken within an area the size of an English county. In the case of Bastar, the language of every-day communication is that of a small Hinduized tribe, known as the Halba, who once served as armed retainers of the Bastar Raja. But despite the recently high levels of assimilation and integration within this culture, the local dialects of the Murias, Marias, Dorla, Dhurwa and Bhattra tribes still remain. Faced with the multiple problems of definition, of illusion, and of transition and transformation, Aidan Southall has argued that the contingent nature of stateless societies (characterised as they are by multi-polities, ritual superintegration, complementary opposition, intersecting kinship and distributive legitimacy) <u>is of their essence</u>, and is not something we ought be trying to sweep away by penetrating analysis. Although this sort of argument has its attractions, it nonetheless has little explanatory force and in reaction some anthropologists have dropped the study of tribes altogether in favour of sub-groups of people who really are lineally related by

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54 J. Abrahams, *The Nyamwezi Today: a Tanzanian people in the 1970's*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

blood. In this way the Dinka of Kenya were divided by Leinhardt into 25 'groups', three of which contained 27, 10 and 6 lineally related 'tribes', whilst John Middleton has defined as many as 60 sub-tribes amongst the Lugbara. [55]

In India, anthropologists now more often speak of 'sub-castes' or *jatis,* as the building blocks of society. However, unless there is a strong element of political control or territoriality associated with such groups these too tend to disintegrate upon closer inspection as soon as essentially exogamous practices such as hypergamy are taken into account. Needless to say, all such endogamous groupings are increasingly irrelevant when talking about modern India, where large-scale migrations are commonplace, where economic and social change is radically re-shaping society, and where marriage taboos are being overthrown at an accelerating rate.

CUSTOM, PROPERTY AND THE THEORY OF 'ANCIENT LAW'

Quite apart from bone structures or ethnic or racial rankings, Victorian ethnographers also saw in Indian tribal societies an earlier form of their own societies, and the definition of tribal institutions and social organisation became a part of Europeans' attempts to describe their own history and evolutionary origin.[56]

Perhaps the most influential such account was Sir Henry Maine's *Ancient Law,* published in 1861. In common with many other thinkers of his time, Maine saw the origins of liberty, freedom and social progress as lying in the growth, out of feudalism, of the private property right. This interpretation of private property was itself in turn founded on the notion of 'possessive individualism' espoused by political theorists such as Hobbes and Locke in the seventeenth century. By the mid nineteenth century this interpretation had become virtually axiomatic, and the objective of writers such as Maine was merely to locate its evolution and historical origins in the past.

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55 A. Southall, *Alur Society*, (Cambridge: Heffer, 1956), p. 44. See also Southall, A., 'A critique of the Typology of States and Political Systems', in *Political Systems and the Distribution of Power*, M. Banton, ed., (New York: Praeger, 1965), 113-140; Southall, A., 'Stateless Society' in *International Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences*, vol. 15, (New York: Macmillan, 1968), 157-168; Southall, A., 'The Illusion of Tribe', *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, vol. v, nos. 1 & 2, (Jan.-April 1970), pp. 28-50. More recent contributions to the literature debunking of the notion of the tribe include L. Vail (ed.), *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa*, (London: James Currey, 1989); W. Samarin, *The Black Man's Burden*, (Boulder and London: Westview, 1989); and J. Willis, *Mombasa, the Swahili and the Making of the Mijikenda*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

56 This is, of course, a principal function of 'orientalist' writing of this period , orientalism being a mode of reasoning and a means of situating contemporary understanding of British and more broadly 'western' society in a global historical and evolutionary context. See G.W. Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology*, (London: Macmillan, 1987) and E. Said, *Orientalism*, (London, 1978) and *Culture and Imperialism* (London 1993).

Henry Maine's mode of reasoning was probably not very different from that of many other nineteenth century writers, such as Bagehot, Herbert Spencer, Engels, Acton or Mill, but his arguments were by far the most brilliant and succinct, and in his own generation were probably also the most influential. Maine's basic thesis, which is familiar to most academics, was that in the very earliest forms of society religion and the rule of law were intimately connected, and that the fundamental unit of both law and society was not the individual, but the group, and in particular, the patriarchal family. Within this family kinship was traced through the male line only, and the solidarity of the family group was underpinned by a variety of religious and symbolic rituals. As the family unit gradually broke down joint holdings and group possessions of land and other forms of property developed, but it was only in later, more progressive societies, that separate, individual holdings and wills became the norm. This gradual break-up of family ties and the emergence of the individual as the usual legal personality was described by Maine, in a now famous phrase, as the transition from status to contract.

India was crucial in Maine's account as a living example of the social and political institutions which he was describing, but which in the west had long since passed into history. Maine was thus fascinated by the debates amongst British officials in India as to the nature of landholding and village structure, and in these debates he saw close parallels with European controversies about the origins of the Mark, the manor, and of feudalism, and concerning the history of the Scottish and Irish clans.

Maine's concerns with social organisation paralleled those of many others in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries attempting to develop typologies of civilisation measured by the yardsticks, variously defined, of material mastery and technological advancement.[57] However fascinating, to Maine, these were nonetheless largely theoretical questions, but to British administrators in India they were questions of immense practical importance. For this reason the comparative theories of Maine and his contemporaries had a great influence and in many cases were siezed upon and applied with vigour. The exponents of both *malguzari* and *ryotwari* systems of settlement, for example, appealed to the theory of the ancient village community in defence of their pet administrative projects, and in the process a great deal of imaginative rewriting of history took place.[58]

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[57] Michael Adas, *Machines as the Measure of Men: science, technology and the ideologies of western dominance*, (Ithaca, 1989).

[58] The authoritative analysis of this question is C.J. Dewey's 'Images of the Village Community: a study in Anglo-Indian ideology', *Modern Asian Studies*, 6, 3 (1972), pp. 291-328. The main limitation of Dewey's analysis is his somewhat schematic categorisation of the political views of the nineteenth century authors he describes as being either 'conservative' or 'radical'. See also A. Kuper, *The Invention of Primitive Society: transformations of an illusion*, (London: Routledge, 1988) for arguments parallel to those of this paper.

From almost every perspective, however, tribal notions of property were invariably described as simply an inversion of modern bourgeois property rights. Even conservative critics of Maine, such as Baden-Powell and Sir George Campbell, who were keen to exorcise the village community of all traces of communism, did so by either appealing to the evidence of diversity, or by arguing that private property was to be found, only vested in some other commodity, such as cattle, rather than land.

The applications of these highly teleological theories about ownership in the settlements of the mid nineteenth century inevitably then spawned contradiction and confusion. This was particularly the case in some of the tribal areas of central India where revenue officers found that the idea of property as understood in the western sense was completely absent. Thus one divisional commissioner enthusiastically commented of tenant rights in Chhattisgarh in eastern Madhya Pradesh: 'surely a more striking example of village communism and of village rights going beyond the ryotwari system of Madras or Bombay could not be imagined'. Yet although officials anguished over the appropriateness of malguzari or ryotwari systems of settlement, none could quite come to grips with the actual function of property rights within tribal societies. Being officials, as were all of Maine's informants for his later work on Village Communities in the East and West, they were instinctively drawn to the study of institutions, to the general neglect of the social and economic processes which underpinned them.[59] Nonetheless many of Maine's theories and observations, canonised in the writings of distinguished anthropologists such as L.H. Morgan, have become accepted truths of anthropological theory.[60]

In an effort to fill this lacuna, and taking also their cue from Ibbetson's observations about the connections between caste and tribal society (quoted earlier in this paper), renewed attention has recently been devoted to the history of tribal kingdoms and tribal societies. An early, imaginative attempt to link kin-based patterns of landholding with institutions

59 See R.G. Fox's insightful comments on this in *Kin, Clan, Raja and Rule*: *state-hinterland relations in preindustrial India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), chapter 4. Fox forms the view that the differences between 'feudalism' and 'tribalism' which obsessed nineteenth century ethnographers arose from an inadequate understanding of superstratification in lineage societies. Thus many societies, he argues, which were apparently 'feudal' were in fact lineage-based. He further claims that the distinction is in any case an artificial one and the product of oriental scholarship, though I suspect his own approach is merely a more subtle interpretation of the 'tribalist' perspective which he found in his sources.

60 See Kuklick, H. "Tribal Exemplars" in G.W. Stocking, ed., *Functionalism Historicized : essays on British Social Anthropology*, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984). A much wider debate on the relationship between anthropology and imperialism has of course since developed: see Talal Asad (ed.), *Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter*, (London: Ithaca, 1973); G. Huizer and B. Mannheim, (eds.), *The Politics of Anthropology: from colonialism and sexism toward a view from below*, (The Hague: Mouton, 1979); Renato Rosaldo, 'From the door of his tent: the fieldworker and the inquisitor', in J. Clifford and G. Marcus (eds.), *Writing Culture: the poetics and politics of ethnography*, (Berkeley: California University Press, 1986); and C. Geertz, *Works and Lives: the anthropologist as author*, (Oxford: Polity Press, 1989).

such as chiefship, and the growth of the tribal state was made by R.G. Fox with his theory of the 'developmental cycle' of the Rajput lineage. Fox's principal source was the somewhat dubious authority of Sir Alfred Lyall, another former officer of the C.P. administration, who was one of the more programmatic of nineteenth century writers on Indian history.[61] Quite apart from the reliability of his evidence, Fox's account is flawed because it tells us nothing about how Rajput kingdoms functioned and reproduced themselves economically. This is no great surprise, as it exactly reflects the obsession of Lyall and his contemporaries with the idiosyncracies of Hindu kinship and religion. But with the the addition of an economic dimension the point of division in Fox's account between the ideological framework of the 'clan' and the practical workings of 'lineage' would become far more apparent, and the debates which obsessed nineteenth century writers, such as whether the joint village was a more or less developed form of the joint property right, would become largely irrelevant.

The study of tribal social structures ought therefore really begin with the study of the practical exigencies of their particular modes of production. Interestingly, however, this approach did not even occur to Indian ethnologists until towards the very end of the colonial period. Perhaps it was no coincidence that this was the period in which colonial development agencies emerged, along with the idea of tribal reservations and the now classical, dichotomous debates as to whether the adivasis should be 'assimilated' or 'preserved', a debate in which participants were pretty much divided along the lines of nationalists versus colonialists. The anthropologists of this period (the exceptions among which may include Verrier Elwin) therefore often continued to shed much more heat than light.

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61 A potted biography of Alfred Lyall is available in R. Owen, 'Anthropology and Imperial Administration: Sir Alfred Lyall and the official use of theories of social change developed in India after 1857' in T. Asad (ed.), *Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter*, (London: Ithaca, 1973), pp. 223-243. See also A. Lyall, *Asiatic Researches, Religious and Social*, (London: John Murray, 1894) and Daniel Thorner's discussion of Indian feudalism in *The Shaping of Modern India*, chapter 13. Lyall's theories on tribes and feudal society in India were largely developed between 1865 and 1878 when he served in the Central Provinces, Berar and in Rajputana. The other key source used by Fox is C.U. Wills, 'The Territorial System of the Rajput Kingdoms of Medieval Chhattisgarh', *Journal and Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal,* New Series XV (1919), 197-262. A collection of the papers of Wills, including notes used in the preparation of this article, is kept in the MPCRO in Nagpur.

CONCLUSION

Although the colonial discourse of caste and tribe in India may have been hegemonic, it was not always uncontested, and it would be a mistake to regard it solely as the effect of a larger project aimed at 'normalising' the sociology of India in order to render it more susceptible to administrative control. It is doubtful in fact that any anthropologist or historian of South Asia has gone so far as to make this explicit suggestion. On the contrary, there is if anything a tendency, recently described in the African case by Christopher Fyfe, for historians to neglect perceptions of race and racial ideology as explanatory variables.[62] Whatever the nature and purpose of the colonial discourse on castes and tribes, it should not therefore be forgotten that the discourse was situated in a political order in which concepts of race were habitually used quite instrumentally. Contemporaries did not need reminding that in general, in the words of Victor Kiernan, 'the lighter the skin, the sharper the sword'.[63] As Lord Dufferin put it: 'The diversity of races in India and the presence of a powerful Mohamedan community, are undoubtedly favourable to the maintenance of our rule...'.[64] Dufferin went on to disown any intention of exacerbating racial conflicts for political ends, but he said nothing whatever about the relationship between the rulers and the ruled. On this, his predecessor (but one) as Viceroy, Lord Lytton, had much firmer views:

> '[G]reat mischief has been done by the deplorable tendency of second-rate Indian officials and superficial English philanthropists to ignore the essential and insurmountable distinctions of race qualities, which are fundamental to our position in India; and thus, unintentionally, to pamper the conceit and vanity of half-educated natives, to the serious detriment of commonsense, and of the wholesome recognition of realities.'[65]

To divorce colonial ethnology from such views and the context in which they arose, and to treat the discourse of castes and tribes as mere faltering steps on the road towards the formulation of a purer science of Indian sociology, would be gravely mistaken. It is not sufficient for historians to recall the racialism of colonial rule without exemplifying and

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62 C. Fyfe, 'Race, empire and the historians', *Race & Class*, 33,4: 15-30, (London: Institute of Race Relations, 1992).

63 V.G. Kiernan, *The Lords of Human Kind: European attitudes towards the outside world in the Imperial Age*, (London: Wiedenfeld Nicolson, 1969).

64 Lord Dufferin in a letter to the editor of the *Pioneer* Newspaper, 1 January 1887, cited in A. Seal, *The Emergence of Indian Nationalism: competition and collaboration in the later nineteeth century*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), p.157.

65 IOR, Lytton Collection, MSS EUR E218/4 & 3: Lytton to Caird (3 dec. 1879) and Lytton to Clarke (26 April 1878); cited in S.R. Ashton, *Colonialism in India*, (London: British Library, 1988).

discussing it, and it is important to recollect the distorted impressions the colonial era has left us of India's pre-colonial past. In the case of the so-called 'adivasis', a description of who they were and where they came from ought not begin by plucking them as specimens from the colonial era, but by examining their resistance to colonialism, and the previous history of the rise and fall of tribal kingdoms in a period when they were much more largely masters of their own fate. To do so is important, since what is called the sociology of nineteenth century India is, as Irfan Habib has argued in a related context, above all the sociology of the colonised written by the colonisers. Before asking 'what is caste', therefore, we must first ask 'who wants to define it ?', and recollect that the discourse of race, caste and tribe was in many ways the Peacock Throne of British India, carried off by the new Constitution of 1950, but still greatly missed by many.[66]

66 I. Habib, 'Studying a colonial economy - without perceiving colonialism', *Modern Asian Studies*, 19, 3, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985). See also Crispin Bates, ' "Lost innocents and the loss of innocence": interpreting *adivasi* movements in South Asia ', in R.H. Barnes, A. Gray and B. Kingsbury (eds.), *Indigenous Peoples of Asia*, (Madison: Association for Asian Studies, 1995).

APPENDIX

Extract from the Proceedings of the Government of India in the Home Department (Public), under date Simla, 25th May 1901.

RESOLUTION

In August 1882, when the statistics of the census of 1881 were still in process of compilation the Census Commissioner suggested that steps should be taken to collect full information regarding castes and occupations throughout British India. The proposal was commended to Local Governments and Administrations, and the Bengal government undertook an Ethnographic Survey of the customs of all important tribes and castes in Bengal and an anthropometric inquiry, according to the methods prescribed by the French anthropologists Broca and Topinard, into the distinctive physical characteristics of selected tribes and castes in Bengal, the North-Western Provinces, Oudh, and the Punjab. The results of these inquiries were recorded in the four volumes of *The Tribes and Castes of Bengal.*

In December 1899, when the preliminary arrangements for the census of 1901 were under consideration, the British Association for the Advancement of Science recommended to the Secretary of State, in the letter appended to this Resolution, that certain ethnographic investigations should be undertaken in connection with the census operations. Their proposals may be summarised as comprising:
(1) Ethnography, or the systematic description of the history, structure, traditions and religious and social usages of the various races, tribes and castes in India;
(2) Anthropometry, or measurements directed to determining the physical types characteristic of particular groups; and
(3) Photographs of typical individuals and, if possible, of archaic industries.

The Scientific importance of the investigations recommended by the British Association is admitted in Sir Arthur Godley's letter, dated 16th January 1900, to the address of the Association, and the Government of India are in entire agreement with this view. It has come to be recognised of late years that India is a vast storehouse of social and physical data which only need to be recorded in order to contribute to the solution of the problems which are being approached in Europe with the aid of material, much of which is inferior in quality to the facts readily accessible in India, and rests upon less trustworthy evidence. Mention may be made of Sir Alfred Lyall's Asiatic Studies, of Professor Haddon's Study of Man, of Emile Senart's Les Castes dans l'Inde, and of Dr. W.Z. Ripley's recent work on the Races of Europe, as showing the extensive use that has been made by the ethnologists of data collected in India...

It is unnecessary to dwell at length upon the obvious advantage to many branches of the administration in this country of an accurate and well arranged record of the customs and domestic and social relations of the various castes and tribes. The entire framework of native conduct of individuals are largely determined by the rules of the group to which they belong. For the purposes of legislation, of judicial procedure, of famine relief, of sanitation and dealings with epidemic disease, and of almost every form of executive

action an ethnographic survey of India, and a record of the customs of the people is as necessary an incident of good administration as a cadastral survey of the land and a record of the rights of its tenants...

It has often been observed that anthropometry yields peculiarly good results in India by reason of the caste system which prevails among Hindoos, and of the divisions, most closely resembling castes, which are recognised by Mohammadans. Marriage takes place only within a limited circle; the disturbing element of crossing is to a great extent excluded; and the differences of physical type, which measurement is intended to establish, are more marked and more persistent than anywhere else in the World. Stress was laid upon these points by Professor Topinard in reviewing at length the results of the measurements taken in Bengal, the N.W.P. and the Punjab, and by the late Sir William Flower in his Presidential address to the British Association in 1894. The Government of India propose to collect the physical measurements of selected castes and tribes. In Madras the work can be done by Mr. E. Thurston, the Superintendent of the Central Museum, whose ethnographic researches in the South of India are well known, and who it is understood is likely to be selected by the Provincial Government as Superintendent of the Ethnography for the Madras Presidency. For the rest of India it will probably be convenient to employ a Civil Hospital Assistant who worked under Mr. Risley. in Bengal and is stated to have a competent knowledge of the subject. This part of the scheme will cost in all about Rs. 6,000, which will be placed at the disposal of Mr. Risley.

The proposal of the Association to place photographers at the disposal of the Census officers is one which could not be carried out in practice....It would be very expensive...Moreover a large collection of photographs already exists at the India Office Library. The government of India are further advised that in comparison with measurements, photographs posses but a little scientific value...

Source: MPCRO, Berar, Miscellaneous, Census Department, 10/1901, Subject: 'Ethnographic Survey of Caste and Tribes in British India'.

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